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Red Reversals Comfort West

WASHINGTON—Exultation is a passing luxury in the hot contention of the cold war but the West cannot avoid at least a flush of satisfaction at the discomforting reversals which the Soviet Union has suffered in the recent revolutions in the Middle East.

The region seemed to beckon to the Communists with the decline in American prestige that followed John Foster Dulles's abrupt rejection of the Aswan Dam project in 1955 and the Iraq revolt of 1958, which took that pivotal country out of the Western alliance and left it in the hands of an uncertain regime.

The Aswan incident plus the West's refusal to sell arms to Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser created a mood in Cairo which gave the Kremlin reason to believe it could tie the Egyptian government closely to its purposes.

Fortunately Nasser proved reluctant to be swallowed by his Communist benefactors and struggled to maintain a balance in his dependence upon the two great blocs. Moving severely against the Communist Party in Egypt, he imprisoned some and excluded others from influence, even in the labor organizations.

Abdel Karim Kassem's advent to power in Iraq in 1958 offered an appealing opportunity for the Communists, whose political party was more compact than any on the scene. Kassem, then judged enigmatic but now discerned to have been somewhat mad, proved an easy foil and in 1958 the Soviet Union could clearly have imposed a dummy regime and absorbed Iraq into the bloc. It was a tempting opportunity that offered the long-sought port on the Persian gulf and a prospect of isolating Iran and pinching Turkey. But perceiving the danger that the thrust would impair Soviet identification with the nationalist movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Khrushchev decided against it.

He chose instead to support Kassem in his stand against joining Nasser in the United Arab Republic, a decision which brought him and the Egyptian to the point of public mutual charges of imperialistic designs in the Middle East. The relationship with Egypt cooled as an era of close dealings between Moscow and Baghdad came to an end. In April, 1959, Allen Dulles of the CIA described the situation in Iraq as "the most dangerous in the world today."

THE IRAQ ADVENTURE was patterned along the lines of a new and more respectable style of encroachment. The role of the local party was played down and the prime policy was was government to government. \$450,000,000 were applied to Iraq's economy and military toward Russia.



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But Kassem proved a poor bet and the very factor of his involvement with the Soviets was a stimulant in the revolt which toppled him into the dust on Feb. 8.

As the new revolutionary council moved into power, the local Communists attempted a counterrevolution and appealed to the world "to protest and expose this bloody fascist deed." They have since paid a heavy and continuing price in executions and repressions which the central committee in Moscow has plaintively decried as "criminal action committed in an atmosphere of anti-Communist hysteria."

But an editorial on March 12 in the semi-official newspaper Al-Jamahir declared the mood of the new regime. The editorial said: "Moscow should be silent and sensible; otherwise our people will add the names of the Soviet Union and every Communist Party which incites traitors, corrupt persons, bribe-seekers, and Kassem's orphans to fight the democratic popular regime of the great revolution to the list of its permanent, bitter enemies."

THUS REBUFFED in Iraq as they were in Syria in 1958, the Communists appear now to retain one major initiative in the Middle East—the massive provision of arms to Nasser in return for the cotton which he is unable to sell in free world markets.

The extent of the weaponry passing from the Soviet Union to Egypt has not generally been recognized. These weapons include the SAM antiaircraft missile which is also in Cuba. The TU-16 bomber with more than double the range and bomb load of the IL-28s taken out of Cuba, and late-model MIG fighters, soon to be embellished with an antiaircraft missile. Nasser's acquisition of these implements along with his construction of a plant to produce (with the aid of European skills) ground-to-ground missiles are giving the Israelis cause for concern. At best the weapons are adding to the inflammability of the region.

United States policy in the Middle East since the Lebanon landings of 1958 has aimed at sustaining the tender balance of stability in the region. The Soviets are pressing for the disruptions in which they seek their aggrandizement.

This is a difficult and uncertain area but it is certainly true that over the recent period, the West has fared considerably better in opposition.



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